

Transportation Planning in Small Metropolitan Areas

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The decennial census is a valuable data base for transportation planning in small metropolitan areas. The residential population, housing, and employment information is useful in the determination of trip-generation patterns and their rate of change. In addition, the census provides information on the work trip such as trip length and mode of travel. The information is used for evaluation of regional growth models, corridor service, and the relationship of automobile ownership to income and household size.

The objectives of the small metropolitan area workshop were to (a) evaluate the utility and comprehensiveness of regular and special products of the 1980 census from the perspective of small metropolitan areas, with particular emphasis on the Urban Transportation Planning Package (UTPP); (b) discuss possible changes in questionnaire content, survey design, geographic coding, products, and other aspects of the 1990 census that affect small urban area transportation planning; and (c) identify continuing and anticipated data needs for transportation planning and determine which of the critical needs are best met by the decennial census.

In small urban areas, the transportation community needs the census data to be coded to block-level geography so that the information can be accumulated to the traffic-analysis-zone level for transportation planning purposes. In these areas, the census is the principal source of data used in the transportation planning process.

During the past three decades the Census Bureau has made great strides in quantity and quality of information provided to the transportation community. However, the 1980 census had its problems: timing of the delivery of the UTPP, errors in place-of-work coding, and delivery of information into the hands of the small urban area planning staffs in a desirable medium. Census personnel have been very cooperative with the transportation community. We continue to endorse the UTPP, realizing that it does not solve all problems for all users. We appreciate the participation of the Census Bureau in this conference and want to continue the communication with them regarding transportation data needs.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Questionnaire Content

Question 24a, travel time, should be replaced with work-trip arrival time. This is needed to obtain the percentage of work trips that occur during peak hours. Travel-time data as now collected are not being used in most small urban areas.

Question 24c, driving or riding arrangement, should be deleted and a category of one person should be added to 24d (how many people rode to work in the car,

etc.). This would provide the same information and it would assist in strengthening the questionnaire.

Questions H28 and H29 should be combined. In the small urban areas, no one differentiates between automobiles and trucks or vans.

Procedures and Sample Size

To obtain a valid sample of workplace data in small urban areas, a higher percentage of the work force is required. The full sample obtained should be coded and tabulated.

In question 24, it is recommended that the wording "last week" be deleted but that the wording "usual" as opposed to "yesterday" be retained. It was believed important to get data on the typical or usual work trip. Use of "last week" may conflict with obtaining usual information.

Geographic Coding

The small urban areas need block-level data. Otherwise the UTPP will be of limited use. In small urban areas, census tracts are usually too large for transportation planning purposes. Small urban areas recommend blockface coding of the entire country to maintain the ability to aggregate the data to the locally desired units, which is particularly desirable in areas with large blocks. The small urban areas support the development of the Census Bureau's TIGER file and its utilization to the fullest extent possible.

It is recommended that the Census Bureau prepare and provide maps for the local planning agencies well in advance of the census to allow time for the development of traffic zone equivalencies before April 1, 1990. It is also recommended that the Census Bureau share their workload with local agencies in the development of the employer address list for coding work addresses. These two actions can expedite the delivery and quality of the UTPP.

Data Products

The standard products and the UTPP should be available for use on microcomputers. Many of the small urban areas do not have access to large mainframe computers. It is desirable that the UTPP be menu driven, allowing the small urban areas to order only data that are beneficial to their program and avoiding the burden of working with tables that are only useful in large metropolitan areas.

Comparability

The expanded sample should agree with the 100-percent totals at the county, place, and tract levels. The lack of agreement in the 1980 data caused some problems.

Institutional and Administrative Concerns

Census outreach should coordinate with local planning agencies in a program to have employers provide their employees with their work address immediately before Census Day. This would improve workplace coding.

Census outreach should keep local officials and planning groups advised of the status of the census. This was a problem in 1980.

It is recommended that there be more sharing of the workload between census and local agencies to ensure greater accuracy of the data and to obtain more local responsibility for the product. This work sharing could improve the quality control and the quality of supervision of census field workers. A technically qualified professional staff member of a local planning agency should be assigned to the local census office to monitor the quality of data collection and coding and to ensure some local responsibility for the quality thereof.